

Mentoring for Effective Positive Workforce: A Case Study

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Abstract

Purpose: To understand the structure and process of mentoring when formalized in an organization and to measure the impact of formalized mentoring in creating a positive work force.

Methodology: An organization where formalized mentoring was established as a part of the organization process was identified and data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews conducted with the human resource manager; executives engaged as mentors and the mentees. The qualitative data was used to develop a case study. Mentees were further met again with a structured questionnaire to measure the impact of mentoring on them and shaping them as a positive workforce.

Findings: The case study reflects the structure and the process through which mentoring can be formally established in an organization. Mentoring yielded positive results because the mentees responded to say that the mentoring process made them felt nurtured, guided and integrated in the organization.

Implications: The findings reinforce the notion that mentoring can be used as a tool to develop a positive workforce and provide insights into the processes and systems which facilitate in establishing and running mentoring as a program in an organization.

Limitations: The findings are limited to an organization and therefore the results cannot be generalized and are specific to the organization.

The mentoring process and structure detailed in the case study vary may not be applicable to other organizations as mentoring needs and process should be tailored according to the profile of the organization.

Keywords: Mentoring, Positive Workforce, Essar Services India Private Limited, Case-study

1. Introduction

In the present competitive world organizations are focused and put in concerted efforts to ensure that they are competitive and are able to sustain the dynamics of the challenging business environment. One of the ways through which organizations improve and enhance their competitiveness is through holding a satisfied group of stakeholders. Research and live examples from successful companies clearly indicate that an organization that has satisfied stakeholders provide organizations with better economic gains and healthy intangibles like enhanced reputation and good will (Hilman & Keim, 2001; Berrone, Surroca, & Tribó, 2007). But holding a satisfied group of stakeholders involves several complexities because the stakeholder group is diverse and heterogeneous in its needs and the power it holds over the organization, on account of which each organization has a unique set of primary and secondary stakeholders. Each organization caters to needs and aspirations of the stakeholders uniquely. They design policies and programmes or offer products and services to ensure the satisfaction and well being of all stakeholders. Employees are considered as one of the most critical stakeholders in terms of the duration of contact and direct impact of productivity (Lynch-Fannon, 2004). They are most closely affected by the performance of the organization and therefore their involvement and stakes are the highest (The Times 100, 2006). They have been appropriately labelled as ‘the most significant non-shareholding corporate stake holding group’ (Lynch-Fannon, 2004).

The organizations establish a relationship with the employee which is fuelled through several activities which are practiced both formally as processes and systems established by the organization or as informal interactions which occur between employees. One such employee developmental activity which happens both formally and informally in organizations is mentoring. Informal mentoring is not documented and measured. No formal resources are allocated and neither is audit measures employed. But the present business environment is marked with technology aided communication, gruelling competition amongst employees and altering demographics of the workforce had led to reduced interaction opportunities between employees (Flynn, 1995; Gaskill, 1993; Kram & Bragar, 1991; Murray & Owen, 1991; Zey, 1988). As a result several organizations have adopted mentoring as a formalized organizational employee developmental activity. The current paper is an attempt to understand formal mentoring structure through a case study of Essar Services India Private Limited, an organization which has established and practices formal mentoring.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Employee as a Stakeholder

Stakeholder, as a business concept was proposed by Freeman (1984) and has been defined as, ‘any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organizations achievements... those groups who have a stake in or claim on the firm. Specifically we include suppliers, customers, employees, stockholders, and the local community, as well as management in its role as agent for these groups’. The concept has received growing acceptance and gaining popularity in the business world over a period of time. Since stakeholders are impacted by the organizations achievements therefore employees become the most crucial group of stakeholders because their lives are directly and most integrally influenced by the organizations well-being. Therefore to ensure a satisfied workforce organizations look at opportunities to contribute to the employee’s work-life beyond merely providing employment such that they contribute productively to the organizations growth (Whitener, 2001; Woods and de Menezes, 1998). Organizations design employee development programmes with the mutually beneficial purpose of helping them understand the vision of the organization, share the core corporate values and culture to ensure that through mutually productive ways both the employee and the organization may be able to contribute to each other’s well being (Gerbman, 2000; Kottke, 1999).

Mentoring programmes in organizations are one such employee development activity which several organizations offer.

2.2. A. What is Mentoring

According to HCI (2008), ‘mentoring is one of the top strategies for career development and advancement’ which has been explained as, ‘a dyadic relationship between a more experienced member of an organization with a less experienced individual’ (Ismail & Arokiasamy, 2007) which helps in building ‘a relationship which gives people the opportunity to share their professional and personal skills and experiences, and to grow and develop in the process’ (Spencer, 2004). The two key players who play an important role in governing the success of the mentoring progress are the mentor and the mentees.

B. Mentor in the Mentoring Process

Since mentoring is a dyadic relationship, the two involved parties are the mentors and mentees. Mentor has been described ‘as someone of advanced rank or experience who guides, teaches, and develops a novice’. (Carr, Bickel and Inui, 2003). The mentor supports the protégée or mentee in both professional or career advancement and the psychosocial development of the mentee (Kram, 1985). So, the mentor acts as a positive catalyst who ensures a holistic development and involvement of the mentee in the organization by helping his mentee in handling both challenges in professional assignments and ensuring that the mentee gets the due attention of the appropriate authorities at work (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Simultaneously, the mentor is also plays the role of a counsellor, friend and a role model (Fagenson, 1989). The mentor therefore facilitates the process of nurturing and providing to the organization a

committed and emotional secure employee who contributes productively to the organizational development and at the same time feels positive and sure of his well being in the organizational space (Burke, 1984; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

C. Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring as a tool for effective workforce is based on the developmental social learning perspective which argues that human behaviour is a result of the interaction which one makes in one's environment where positive role models reinforce the learning and instils a behaviour pattern (Sarason et al, 1991; Baldwin, 1992). It helps in reducing the stress and anxiety of the new comer, provides orientation and promotes the creation of better norms of collegiality and collaboration to support and guidance offered by the mentoring. The employees feel positive, secure and confident of the environment in which they work.

Mentoring leads to creating dual mutually beneficial relationships – one between the mentor and the mentee and second between the new employee and the organization. In the attempt to offer guidance and support to the mentee, the mentor garners his resources and skill set such that it benefits him in conjuring his technical base better which can be used by him in future (Hunt and Micheal, 1983). Added, a positive mentee performance helps in enhancing the reputation of the mentor. The benefits to an organization is a cumulative result of a positive and guided new employee under a trained and committed senior all of which results in improved organizational performance, satisfied work force, lower attrition and improved employer branding (Kram, 1985, Fagenson, 1989; Okurame & Balogun, 2005)

D. Forms of Mentoring

Mentoring is practiced in two forms across organizations – informal and formal. Informal mentoring is spontaneous and happens as individuals connect according to their personal disposition while formal mentoring is facilitated by the organization where a structure is created and a process is put in place. The process of selecting and aligning the mentee to mentors is deliberate with the specific purpose and objective of creating a positive workforce and enhancing organizational effectiveness.

2.3. Formal Mentoring at Essar: A Case Study

About Essar Group

The Essar Group was founded in 1969, by Mr. Shashi Ruia and Mr. Ravi Ruia with the construction of an outer breakwater in Chennai port. It quickly moved to capitalize on every emerging business opportunity, becoming India's first private company to buy a tanker in 1976. The Group also invested in a diverse shipping fleet and oilrigs, when the Government of India opened up the shipping and drilling businesses to private players in the 1980s. With the turn of the century the group has been consolidating and growing the businesses with mergers and acquisitions, new revenue streams and strategic geographical expansion.

With every milestone which the company achieved, it got closer to understanding the crucial needs of talent management and development. The need to

nurture internal talent has been integral to Essar where, as put in by a senior manager, 'environment is very conducive to self development. The top management – Shashi Ruia, Ravi Ruia were father figures guiding us through the maze of professional and personal challenges. And Prashant Ruia was one amongst us. Whether it was the reassuring guidance of Dileep Oommen, the scientific approach of Vikram Amin, or the astute coaching of S L Kaul and K Subramaniam, I had all the support I required to scale new heights in record time'.

Organizational Programs to Nurture Coaching and Mentoring at Essar

As a part its performance management process every employee is entitled to receive coaching and mentoring from the immediate supervisor, who is exposed to various coaching and mentoring techniques with abundant resources like internally developed Essar book of coaching and mentoring, which helps share success stories of the coaches and mentees; coaching and mentoring summits where Essar coaches and mentors come together to laud and learn from successes across businesses and locations; and performance coaching where all Essar managers undergo performance coaching workshops.

The Essar certified coach for Essar managers undergo a 6 - 9 months program. Select coaches are awarded the prestigious Essar Starfish Award.

Events under Mentoring

Now, to sustain and spread the awareness of Mentoring centrally in the organization, there are certain events that they undertake. Some of them are:

Find the GURU within workshop

This initiative has acted as one of the greatest gifts a mentor can offer as unconditional, open sharing of ideas and wisdom to grow their ideas and talents.

Everyone benefits, not only obviously the person receiving advice and direction from a trusted mentor, but also the mentor himself benefits greatly from the experience.

- When a mentee takes the time to seek out a talented mentor, he/she should ask for advice, and aspire to a particular habit, behavior, or way of life that he/she can improve.
- The initiative helps the mentee in following aspects:
 - Figure out what matters to him and his growth
 - Amplify his focus by removing lesser priorities
 - Connect with people and ideas more closely aligned
 - Identify and remove blind spots
- The best mentors develop a deep emotional fluency such that they have strong understanding of their mentees strengths.
- Essar has developed a remarkably successful coaching and mentoring program by appealing to cultural influences. Indians believe in rebirth and the cyclical nature of life, which means aspiring towards being immortal, becoming “AMAR” in Hindi.

The philosophy of mentoring at Essar teaches that a way to become immortal is to mentor. Senior executives and managers are encouraged to develop their immortal

self through developing the wise guru within another, younger associate. By tapping into this intrinsic motivation to build an eternal legacy of wisdom, executives see clearly they have a path to create a legacy, and preserve their own immortal wisdom through others.

- They believe “The etymology of guru is “teacher” or “master.” Guru has also come to mean “one who dispels the darkness of ignorance.”

1 day workshop for middle managers

- This workshop is mainly organized for the mentors to understand the importance of being the same and also to understand the way of deliverance under the same.
- Being a mentor does not give right to interfere in all that a mentee does. It is always advisable to maintain a distance in certain matters. It is also very important to make the mentors understand the same. The workshop covers primary matters of handling a position as a mentor, such as the one just discussed.

Mentor – Mentee meets

- Under this initiative a formal meet is setup when the mentor and the mentee meet each other for the first time and get to know each other.
- It is a half day workshop and is mainly done to facilitate the new comers into the organization and thus make them feel comfortable into the organization.
- The main objective of this program is to cement relationships between the two and thus bring both the parties to know each other.
- The first meeting is done formally but after they know each other, they intend to meet informally to discuss their issues.

Performance coaching workshop

- Coaching as we discussed is undergone only to enhance organizational performance of an employee. Thus, a half day workshop is organized to enhance the coaching skills of a coach and to make them realize about the fact that their advices have to be in a very specific direction where their prime importance would be to empower the follower in such a way that it increases organizational effectiveness.

Essar Certified Course

- Under this course a kind of test is taken for all the mentors who have attended all the 50 sessions in a workshop of becoming a mentor. It is mainly done to understand how much have they learned out of the workshop and also to know whether they are capable of mentoring someone or not.
- Basically, their mentoring skills are tested and if they pass satisfactorily, they are granted a certificate of becoming a mentor and then can start with that designation into the organization.

Coffee sessions

- This is an exercise where the mentor sits with his mentee and they discuss upon the latter's schedule and time table to organize and justify all the tasks that he/she has to do.
- It is a 2-3 hours workshop where also the issues or challenges of the later are discussed and handled. Mentor acts as a support system and things are discussed over a coffee to give an informal touch to their conversation.
- It can be held anywhere in the organization and not necessarily in the mentor's cabin. Actually it would be most preferred top not conduct it in the cabin as it would act as a pressure (sometimes) on the mentee and he/she would not be able to open up.

How to be a good Coachy - Mentor workshop

- A workshop is conducted under which the required **Knowledge, Skills and Attitude** to become a coach and a mentor are explained. It explains how positive and constructive it is to become a coach or a mentor.
- This majorly concentrates on making the employees understand how important it is to become a mentor and generating an acceptance for mentoring an employee keeping their ego or problems aside.

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